

MANUFACTURING EXTENSION PARTNERSHIP

Success Stories from the Field

Commercial Sewing

Connecticut State Technology Extension Program

Software System Search Leads To Unexpected Benefits At Commercial Sewing

Client Profile:

Commercial Sewing, established in 1967, designs and manufactures recreational vehicle covers and accessories and is the exclusive supplier for Arctic Cat, Yamaha, Polaris, and Kawasaki. A family-owned business, the company employs 127 people in its Torrington, Connecticut facility.

Situation:

The time had come for Commercial Sewing to find a new system to replace its outdated, maxed-out software. A lean manufacturing specialist from the Connecticut State Technology Extension Program (CONNSTEP), a NIST MEP network affiliate, suggested the company address its information technology needs from a lean perspective. Commercial Sewing agreed to try a new method, and met with a CONNSTEP information systems specialist in July 2001.

Solution:

CONNSTEP pointed out that when selecting a software package, determining the system requirements is the first step. That's where value stream mapping (VSM) and lean information flow (LEINFLO) come in. Mapping processes and information flow throughout the company shows how one activity impacts another. A team of ten people made up of vice-presidents or managers from manufacturing, purchasing, accounting, shipping, inventory, production control, and customer service participated in a value stream mapping exercise to understand the company's process flow and the interrelationship of each activity with the others.

The team met with CONNSTEP for three hours a week over the course of about five months. The value stream map revealed unclear boundary issues, overlapping work, and stalled projects, which highlighted Commercial Sewing's reliance on the back end to drive the processes.

Commercial Sewing's core group did not wait for the selection of a new software system to make improvements. They targeted excess work-in-process, applied lean techniques, and made a 60 percent reduction. Now work orders are not released for production unless all materials are available in inventory, enabling manufacturing to complete the project within two days without interruption. Customer changes are now entered into the computer system before the work order is printed. The core team also stopped rewarding workers with a piecework rate of pay and moved to a team-oriented pay system. Rates of pay are based on the skill level of the operator, production efficiency, and

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quality level. The employees are delighted to be on the new system, as it considerably reduces their stress levels.

Value stream mapping and lean information flow have prompted change and brought Commercial Sewing closer to finding a technical solution that will help the company run more efficiently. Detailed knowledge will help Commercial Sewing choose the right business information system for the real needs of the company. Without this level of knowledge, managers would have been guessing at solutions for what they presumed to be their needs. Now the guesswork is transformed into working knowledge, and has already delivered measurable benefits. CONNSTEP assisted Commercial Sewing through the Soft Select process. The company answers a series of questions to determine possible software vendor matches. Out of ten possible matches, Commercial Sewing has selected three that seem to fit the long-term goals of the company. The plan is to have a single source selected by August 2002.

Results:

Reduced work-in-process from a five-day work plan to a two-day build system, or 60 percent.

Moved to a pay system that encourages teamwork, skill level, efficiency, and quality.

Improved on-time delivery from 82 to 91 percent.

Selected vendors for initial software selection.

Testimonial:

"Change is very difficult to orchestrate, and I'm certain that CONNSTEP's sincere concern for our future was instrumental and the missing ingredient to our success."

Gregory J. Perosino, President